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ABSTRACT

Until very recently, with the exception of adult religious education, spirituality has been given little attention in mainstream academic adult education. This may be because spirituality is difficult to define and can be confused with religion. The subject of spirituality is currently a theme in workplace and human resource development literature. Most recent discussions in adult and higher education specifically focus on the role of spirituality in teaching and learning. Attending to spirituality in learning does not necessarily mean that one needs to discuss it directly in classes or learning activities, although there may be occasions for drawing it into course content. Given the connection between adult learning and adult development, discussions of spiritual development are relevant to concerns in adult education. Most developmental theorists who write about spiritual development connect it with other aspects of development. Most often cited is Fowler (1981) who developed a stage theory of faith development. Many writers draw on Fowler's work but focus on spiritual development at particular points in the life cycle. The role of spirituality in culturally relevant education and emancipatory education efforts is being addressed. Spirituality is one way people construct knowledge and meaning. It works in consort with the affective, the rational or cognitive, and the unconscious and symbolic domains. (Contains 36 references.) (YLB)

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Spirituality In Adult and Higher Education

by Elizabeth J. Tisdell

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"The spiritual awakening that is slowly taking place counterculturally will become more of a daily norm as we all willingly break mainstream cultural taboos that silence or erase our passion for spiritual practice" (hooks 2000, p. 82). Spirituality is a hot topic. Bookstores are filled with many popular titles related to it, from Western religions to traditions of the East to new-age philosophies. What are adult and higher education practitioners to make of this new emphasis on spirituality? On the one hand, many of us might resonate with hooks' observation that spirituality has a role in breaking the silence that erases our passion as well as a place in higher and adult education. On the other, we may also wonder, as Wuthnow (1998) observes, "whether 'spiritual' has become synonymous with 'flaky'" (p. 1). This *Digest* provides a summary of the recent literature related to spirituality as it relates to adult learning. It begins with an overview of the more general literature on spirituality in adult and higher education. Next is a consideration of some of the literature related to spiritual development. In the last section is a consideration of spirituality and emancipatory education.

General Discussions of Spirituality

Until very recently, with the exception of adult *religious* education, spirituality has been given little attention in mainstream academic adult education. This may be because *spirituality* is difficult to define and can sometimes be confused with religion. For many of us, our adult spirituality is clearly informed by how we were socialized both religiously and culturally. Yet, spirituality is not the same as religion; religion is an organized community of faith that has written codes of regulatory behavior, whereas spirituality is more about one's personal belief and experience of a higher power or higher purpose. In seeking to define "spirituality" (as opposed to "religion"), Hamilton and Jackson (1998) conducted a qualitative study of the conceptions of spirituality among women in the helping professions. Participants' definitions centered on three main themes: the further development of self-awareness, a sense of interconnectedness, and a relationship to a higher power. Although this definition does give a sense of the psychological aspects of spirituality as broadly related to meaning-making, it does not get at the relationship of cultural experience and spirituality or the connection between spirituality and a commitment to social justice education and community work, an important area of educational activity for many adult educators. Nevertheless, these three themes of spirituality appear to be common aspects of what spirituality is for most who consider it an important meaning-making aspect of their life.

Most recent discussions in adult and higher education specifically focus on the role of spirituality in teaching and learning. A number of new edited books focus on its role specifically in adult education (English and Gillen 2000), and in education more generally as the construction of knowledge (Glazer 1999) or in dealing with religious pluralism in higher education settings (Kazanjian and Laurence 2000). A common theme is the focus on meaning-making in adult learning as intricately related to the spiritual quest of adults (Hunt et al. 2001). Vella (2000) suggests that attending to the spiritual dimension of adult learning is part of honoring the learner as "subject," and thus the author of her/his own life in the quest for meaning-making.

Attending to spirituality in learning doesn't necessarily mean that one needs to discuss it directly in classes or learning activities, although there may be occasions for drawing it into course content. Dirkx (1997) has suggested that our interest is not so much to teach soulwork, or spirituality, but rather to *nurture* soul, i.e., "to recognize what is already inherent within our relationships and experiences, to acknowledge its presence with the teaching and learning environment, to respect its sacred message" (p. 83). In a similar vein, Palmer (1998) discusses the importance of attending to paradox, sacredness, and graced moments in teaching and learning, in developing a spirituality of education. Lerner (2000) presents an approach to spirituality that he calls an "emancipatory spirituality." An emancipatory spirituality, in contrast to a "reactionary spirituality" (p. 174), recognizes the value of pluralism and the many manifestations of spirit within different cultures, religions, and traditions. He discusses how spirituality might inform work in education, law, medicine, and environmental issues without pushing a religious agenda. Eck (2001) also addresses how to deal with issues of religious pluralism in a way that opens up dialogue between and among groups and honors their spirituality and religious traditions without pushing a religious agenda.

The subject of spirituality is currently a theme in workplace and human resource development literature. Bolman and Deal (1995), among others, have discussed its role in leadership development. Fenwick and Lange (1998) reviewed the literature on spirituality and the workplace in human resource development circles, suggesting that it has an emphasis on individual needs and organizational development rather than a focus on social justice or the common good. However, some writers do discuss the role of spirituality in work related to a more just global economy. Fox (1995), for example, examines the connection between spirituality as "inner work" and the revisioning of our "outer work" and the importance of ritual and celebration in the creation of a new cosmology as the great paradigm shift of our time. Haroutiounian et al. (2000) discuss the learning that took place in a class on spirituality and work, largely because of the diversity of the participants. Barnett, Krell, and Sendry (2000) also address how to approach the subject of spirituality in management education classes.

Spiritual Development

Given the connection between adult learning and adult development, discussions of spiritual development are relevant to concerns in adult education. Most developmental theorists who write about spiritual development connect it with other aspects of development. Most often cited is James Fowler (1981) who developed a stage theory of faith development based on a study of 359 adults. Fowler ties faith development strongly to cognitive and moral development and draws heavily on the work of Piaget and Kohlberg. Yet he takes issue with them for "their restrictive understanding of the role of imagination in knowing, their neglect of symbolic processes generally and the related lack of attention to unconscious structuring processes other than those constituting reasoning" (p. 103). Despite some limitations of Fowler's study (e.g., a sample that is almost entirely White and Judeo-Christian), it contributes to our understanding of how people construct knowledge through image and symbol, an area that has been ignored by most development and learning theorists.

Many writers draw on Fowler's work, but focus on spiritual development at particular points in the life cycle. For example, Parks' (2000) focus is on young adults, whereas Loder (1998) discusses it from a theological perspective in adolescence, young adulthood, the middle years, and after age 65. Wuthnow (1998) presents a study of how those who have grown up religious have negotiated an adult spirituality. Terkel's (2001) new book is a discussion of how people's spirituality influences their view of death. Borysenko (1999) considers women's spiritual development more from the perspective of salient themes, such as naming a sense of mystery, spiritual identity and healing, and the role of ritual and prayer in development; she offers suggestions for how women might develop their spirituality.

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Whether or not spiritual development unfolds in a series of linear stages is a matter of some debate and, as Wilber (2000) observes, depends on how one defines spirituality. Writing from a cultural evolutionary perspective, Wilber discusses how, over time, cultures as well as individuals develop spiritually. He suggests that spiritual development unfolds in overlapping and interweaving levels "resulting in a meshwork or dynamic spiral of consciousness unfolding" (p. 7). Each level includes and expands on the development of earlier stages and moves to greater integration. This move to greater integration reflects an important theme of spiritual development: the ongoing development of identity. In my study of women emancipatory educators (Tisdell 2000), several referred to it as related to the development of their more "authentic identity." But this authentic identity always develops in a cultural and gendered context. This is why it is important to consider the cultural dimensions of spiritual development, an area that most developmental theorists have given little attention to.

Spirituality, Culture, and Emancipatory Education

The role of spirituality in culturally relevant education and emancipatory education efforts is being addressed. Clearly, spirituality played a large role in the engagement of people's passion in the civil rights movement. Further, both Horton and Freire (1990) were clear about the influence of spirituality on their own work. Walters and Manicom (1996) discuss the importance of spirituality among grassroots emancipatory adult educators working with women in an international context. They note that spirituality "is a theme that is increasingly significant in popular education practice as culturally distinct groups, women recovering 'womanist' traditions and ethnic collectives, draw on cultural and spiritual symbols in healing and transformative education" (p. 13).

Educators and cultural workers are beginning to break the silence about the connection between spirituality and education and about its role in emancipatory education efforts. As the cultural fabric of North America is changing, there is a greater emphasis on creating culturally relevant programs for specific population groups. When spirituality is integral to the fabric of a community, it makes sense that educators might attend to it. But there are also greater numbers of people of color represented both in higher education classrooms and among adult educators working in community settings or higher education. This is beginning to displace the strict focus on rationality, particularly from a Eurocentric perspective, as the only valid form of knowledge. Many scholars doing cultural work in communities or in the reformation of the academy have worldviews deeply embedded in the spiritual. "The heretofore silencing of the spiritual voice through privileging the academic voice is increasingly being drowned out by the emphatic chorus of those whose underlying versions of truth cry out 'We are a spiritual people!'" (Dillard et al. 2000, p. 448).

This is why some writers have discussed the spiritual development of members of different cultural groups; e.g., African American women—Wade-Gayles (1995), Cannon (1996), Williams (1993); American Indian communities—Allen (1992), Deloria (1993); and Latinos—Abalos (1998). Berry (1999) speaks of spiritual development as being foundational to our ecological survival, and Welch (1998) notes its role in developing approaches to multicultural education. Tisdell et al. (2001) recently discussed its role in developing culturally relevant and transformative approaches in adult and higher education settings.

Spirituality is one of the ways people construct knowledge and meaning. It works in consort with the affective, the rational or cognitive, and the unconscious and symbolic domains. To ignore it, particularly in how it relates to teaching for personal and social transformation, is to ignore an important aspect of human experience and avenue of learning and meaning-making. This is why spirituality is important to the work of adult learning.

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